

**Prolonged Anticipations:
Towards a Theory of Counterline
(A Mock Proposal)**

The term "counterpoint" seems to have been first used in the early 1300's, when it was used to describe the setting of note against note – *punctus contrapunctum*.¹ During the centuries that followed, polyphony of course expanded to include not only note-against-note contexts but an entire range of rhythmic and melodic relationships between voices. In parallel, the meaning of the term "counterpoint" was expanded also such that we now have our modern definition of counterpoint as "the combination of two or more melodic lines [or] the linear consideration of melodic lines sounding together."²

A point and a line are different entities, however. Of course, a line is a succession of points, and we can go back and forth quite easily with polyphonic music between looking at the notes themselves and looking at the strings of notes. Yet there seems to be a tendency in modern theory – a tendency that I would argue is manifest in the term "counterpoint" itself – to preference the points over the lines. In other words, the identification of moment-to-moment consonances and dissonances often seems to take analytical priority over the more important "linear considerations" of the voices themselves. Instead of a theory of *counterpoint*, therefore, I would like to propose a theory of *counterline*, where individual voices have more independence and need less to be coordinated on a note-by-note, point-by-point basis.

A theory of counterline allows for individual voices to be viewed as shifting in and out of phase with the harmonic and metric framework. Particularly in polyphonic textures of Baroque music, the strong sense of harmony and meter provides a solid foundation on which a fair amount of apparent dissonance can be cohesively supported. It is my thesis that individual

¹ Oliver B. Ellsworth, "Contrapunctus," *Grove Music Online*, edited by L. Macy.

² Don Randel, editor. *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1986): 205.

polyphonic voices can and should thus be viewed as more "goal-oriented" than they are in contemporary theoretical practice.

To explore this theory of counterline, let us take the notion of anticipation as a case study. Most modern theorists, for example, seem tied to the overly restrictive definition of the anticipation as a single note on a weak beat that precedes a strong-beat occurrence of the same pitch.³ In comparison with the suspension, which is often a hallmark of sequential passages, the anticipation is seen as extremely rare, happening mostly at cadences, and "seldom used in 'chain' fashion."⁴ In other words, syncopation seems to be something that happens in one direction, but rarely the other.

As a counterexample, I provide an excerpt from J. S. Bach's Two-Part Invention #6 as Example #1, in which a clear sequence of anticipations can be seen in the 32nd-note figures of bars 28ff. These 32nd-note figures are obvious embellished anticipations to the stronger-beat sixteenth notes. While the final 32nd note of measure 29 could potentially be viewed as an consonant chord tone with the harmony, I think such an analysis is a misreading due to the prevailing pattern in this section; the final 32nds note of each bar is obviously a lower neighbor of the anticipation throughout.

With Bach's Invention #6 in mind, let us examine how a modern theorist labels non-harmonic tones in another invention-type setting. Example 2 is an excerpt from Kent Kennan's recent textbook *Counterpoint*.⁵ According to the back cover, Kennan's *Counterpoint* is supposedly "the leading text in the field," so its views must represent the theory field to some extent. In this example, which labels the opening bars of Bach's Three-Part Invention #12,

³ See Walter Piston, *Counterpoint*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1947): 53-54 or Felix Salzer and Carl Schachter, *Counterpoint in Composition*, 1969 (Morningside edition, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989): 80.

⁴ Kent Kennan, *Counterpoint: Based on Eighteenth-Century Practice*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999): 71.

⁵ Kennan: Example 8a on p. 41.

Kennan calls the first sixteenth note of the second beat of bar 1 (pitch A) as a passing note between the eighth-note B and the sixteenth-note G#. Is it not possible, though, to hear this pseudo-mordent figure as strongly reminiscent of the embellished anticipation from the Two-Part Invention #6?

Some theorists may comment that this possibility for dual meanings is part of the beauty of the tonal system, but I would strongly disagree. Foremost, if we take the A on the second half of beat 2 as a passing note between the B and G#, we are implying that both B and G# are structural pitches – a sort of compound melody. But then from where did the G# derive? The most obvious potential source for the G# was from the right-hand's opening A, which would be seen thus as splitting into the B and G#. But with this derivation, we would have parallel octaves between the bass line and the posited middle voice since both would be moving from A to G#. It makes no sense, therefore, to conceive of the G# as a structural pitch given Bach's bass line. Instead, the G# must be a lower-neighbor embellishment to the A, which is a prolonged anticipation to the A of beat 3 in the right hand. With this view, the G# does not have to be reconciled since it is a non-harmonic tone of a non-harmonic tone.

It is important to recognize that by viewing the figure of beat 2 as a prolonged anticipation, something more has occurred than merely the revision of a label. For example, if a student were given the right-hand subject only and asked to compose an imitative piece, that student – because of the desire to avoid parallel octaves – would probably be highly averse to writing the bass line that Bach has selected if the G# at the end of beat 2 were not seen as an ornamental tone. The student might be tempted to put an E in the bass perhaps, but the lower voice would lose the linear charm that it has in Bach's version. But then how does one identify harmonic and non-harmonic tones when there is only a melody?

The answer to this question relates back to how non-harmonic tones are traditionally reconciled. As Example 2 shows, modern theory's default derivation for non-harmonic tones – even sometimes in the face of poor voice-leading – is from a previously sounding harmony. Anticipations are only rarely seen by some theorists, but perhaps this rarity is due to an analytical system that tends as much as possible to explain them away. This default derivation, however, can create unnecessary compositional complications. Especially in Baroque music, where imitation, canon, fugue, etc. are inherently complicated processes, a composer requires (and I would argue actually used) more flexibility in voice-leading than is currently offered.

Turning once again to Example 2, I would argue that we should view all the melodic sixteenth-notes in m. 1 as anticipations to the eighth-notes that immediately follow. In the last beat of this first measure, for instance, the B that Kennan labels as the beginning of a changing-note figure can more simply be viewed as an anticipation to the B that occurs on the downbeat of m. 2. In this way, the pattern of anticipation that was most easily observed from beat 2 is continued. The last two sixteenth-notes of bar 1 – G# and A – are thus embellishments that further prolong the anticipation. Notice as well how the sixteenth-notes from beat 1 are identical to the last two sixteenth-notes at the end of the bar; both figures lead up the third to the structural note of B. I call this type of anticipation – where the anticipated note is not literally sounded but precursored by linear motion – a linear anticipation.

Before further explaining the linear anticipation, I would like to provide some support from other theorists. In Example 3, Riemann shows a case of prolonged anticipations through the use of neighbor-note figures.⁶ In Example 4, I have an excerpt from a textbook of Ernst Krenek, who was one of the most prolific composers of the 20th century. Krenek's text is

⁶ Hugo Riemann, *Text-Book of Simple and Double Counterpoint*, translated by S. Harrison Lovewell (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1904): 43.

specifically designed to explain the polyphonic style of J. S. Bach. Of this example, Krenek writes: "Dissonance is created through anticipation of one *or more* of the characteristic tones of the chord subsequently suggested by the harmonic background."⁷

The notion of prolonged anticipations, while not termed as such, is therefore not an entirely new notion, despite its lack of recognition by many modern theorists. Part of the reason for this lack of recognition, I believe, is due in part to the only limited extent to which previous theorists have developed the idea. Therefore, among other tasks, I would like to explore the situations and contexts in which anticipation – as a more abstract idea – plays a role in polyphonic writing. Thus far, I have identified a few categories of prolonged anticipations: the embellished anticipation, the harmonic anticipation, the pivot anticipation, and the linear anticipation. These categories are not mutually exclusive, and many examples seem to share overlapping aspects.

For instance, Example 5 (J. S. Bach, Courante from French Suite #6) shows what I call a pivot anticipation. In bar 7 of this excerpt, a clear tonic chord of E major is outlined. Two bars later, we move to a dominant-seventh sonority on F# (V/V), which prepares the B major chord that arrives a bar later. Now look closely at measure 8. The harmony in measure 8 is clearly a C# minor chord. But in the first beat of this bar, there is an A natural in the moving line, whereas in the last beat of this same bar, there is an A#. Thus at the beginning of the measure, the C# minor chord acts as a submediant (vi) in E major, whereas by the end of the measure, C# minor is reinterpreted as a supertonic (ii) in B major. I would posit that the A# is not acting as a chord-tone anticipation to the A# in the following bar, despite its similar registral placement, because of the weak metrical placement of the A#. As well, the C# bass tone underneath the B

⁷ Ernst Krenek, *Tonal Counterpoint: In the Style of the Eighteenth Century* (Boosey & Hawkes, 1958): 19.

helps us hear the B as the more structural pitch in this bar. Yet the A# is crucial, since it mentally prepares the listener for the upcoming dominant harmony.

In contrast to the pivot anticipation, the linear anticipation is perhaps more difficult to prove. It is easiest to prove an anticipation when dealing with minor harmonies or changing keys, since the accidentals give away the function of a chord more clearly. It is thus harder to definitively show anticipations in situations that lack accidentals since non-harmonic tones can always be reckoned in some way to prior harmonies. Take a look at Example 6, though, which is a C major Fugue from J. S. Bach's book of *Little Preludes and Fugues*. Notice that m. 16 begins with a minor third of D and F, in the middle of which a seventh of C is suspended. We are in A minor at this point in the music, and an E-major dominant harmony is reached on beat 2 of m. 16 quite clearly. The dissonant C at the beginning of the measure most obviously resolves to the B in the middle voice on beat 2. Yet this resolution on B is precursored by a linear stepwise motion in the same notated voice. This line of F#, G#, and A is highly dissonant against the prevailing harmony in this measure – the F# rubs against the perceptually-sustaining F natural in the upper voice. What, then, is the derivation of this ascending, highly-dissonant line in the middle voice? The line here is certainly some sort of anticipation to the dominant harmony of E on the next beat. However, I do not see this line as acting as a chord-tone anticipation or pivot anticipation. I see the ascending stepwise motion as a linear anticipation of this B.

To help understand this derivation, compare this ascending stepwise outline of a perfect fourth with the fugal subject of this work. That F#-G#-A-B line in the middle voice of m. 16 is an augmentation of the opening motive, which reappears throughout the work with similar diatonic reinterpretations. If we use our accepted notion of non-harmonic tones as tones reconciled with the previous harmony, that first note of the fugue subject changes function as a

consonance or a dissonance throughout the work. In bar 16, for example, the bass entry is consonant with the prevailing E chord and leads nicely to its resolution on A a beat later. But now take a look at the soprano entry near the end of bar 11 or the middle voice entry in bar 28. The fugue subject enters in both cases at the interval of a fourth (or its compound) with the bass. Of course, we could always explain away the apparent dissonance of bar 11, for example, by positing that an earlier F is sustained until this entry. But what is the point of reconciling this dissonance with an prior tone or harmony? We hear the stepwise motion of G-A-B as leading to C, and the slurs in the music (which I believe are Czerny's) reflect this obvious hearing.

Again, it may seem trivial or merely academic as to whether or not such instances are reconciled with the previous chord or seen as an anticipation of the next harmony. But it becomes a very important issue for someone writing a fugue as to how these lines are conceived. By conceiving of the stepwise ascent that opens the fugue subject as a linear anticipation, it does not matter how and where the entry occurs, as long as the final top note – the end of the outlined fourth – is consonant with the chord on the next beat. This revised view helps loosen some of the unnecessary restrictions that a young composer might feel when working in a complicated texture such as a fugue.

Thus far, I have given a few instances of the independence of and sometimes non-coordination between individual polyphonic voices. Examples 7-10 provide some additional situations. Notice the parallel fourths in m. 4 of Example 7, the conflicting linear motion in bars 22-23 of Example 8, the harmonic anticipation at the beginning of bar 22 in Example 9, and the highly-dissonant final chords that Example 10. While theorists have become experts at reducing such situations to classic voice-leading models, I do not believe we have codified all the ways and methods that composers flesh-out and realize these supposed background structures.

In summary, I began this proposal by introducing a simple play on words: a theory of counterline instead of counterpoint. Yet behind this little pun, I think, lies a different way of thinking about polyphony, one that does not require independent voices to be completely dependent on one another. The concept of prolonged anticipation is an integral part to this theory of counterline and has provided a good case study, but it certainly not the only component. Linear aspects, whether anticipated or delayed, are the central focus. Since all of the musical examples in this proposal were drawn from a small selection of keyboard music by J. S. Bach, the rest of his opus remains to be explored. Additionally, it would be interesting to see the extent to which these characteristics are employed by other Baroque composers and whether they can be used of hallmarks of a style. The most powerful ramifications of a revised notion of polyphony, however, I believe would lie in the realms of pedagogy and compositional modeling, where students would have a more relaxed approach to polyphonic writing – one that emphasizes a both forward- and backward-looking views of surface patterns instead of our current solely-retroactive vantage.

LIST of EXAMPLES

Example 1: J. S. Bach, Two-Part Invention #6, mm. 28-31

Example 2: Analysis of J. S. Bach's Sinfonia #12, mm. 1-3 in Kennan, *Counterpoint*, p. 41

Example 3: Hugo Riemann, *Textbook of Simple and Double Counterpoint*, problem 20, p. 43

Example 4: Ernst Krenek, *Tonal Counterpoint*, ex. 47, p. 19

Example 5: J. S. Bach, mm. 7-9 from the Courante of the French Suite #6.

Example 6: J. S. Bach, C major Fugue (No. 4, Allegro moderato), *Little Preludes & Fugues*

Example 7: J. S. Bach, Gavotte from *French Suite #4* (mm. 1-4)

Example 8: J. S. Bach, Sinfonia #10, mm. 22-24

Example 9: J. S. Bach, Short 2-voice Fugue, No. 3 from *Little Preludes and Fugues*, mm.

Example 10: J. S. Bach, Loure from *French Suite #5* (mm. 14-16)

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